

House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
No Safe Spaces Congressional Testimony Regarding Free Speech on College Campuses
July 27, 2017

Chairman Jordan and members of the subcommittee;

The stars of our film, comedian Adam Carolla and nationally syndicated talk-show host Dennis Prager, both make their living by sharing ideas. Our filmmaking team is comprised of Hollywood veterans that would not have a career telling stories and making movies if it weren't for the rights granted to us by the 1st Amendment. The issue of free speech is dear to all of us, which is why Adam Carolla is representing our film in Congress to testify on this issue. We thank you for the opportunity, and acknowledge your intrepidity for inviting a well-known comedian to speak his mind. Paraphrasing our 40th President, Ronald Reagan, the *eight* most terrifying words in the English language are, "I'm from Hollywood and I'm here to help."

Adam Carolla and Dennis Prager share no similarities as it pertains to their academic careers. Carolla had an undistinguished and short lived effort (if you can call it that) at a community college, while Prager is Ivy League educated. But despite academic pedigree, the chilling of free speech concerns all of us, especially when it's at the epicenter of what should be the place where ideas are shared and challenged the most—college.

This concern over free speech on college campuses operates on several levels. First, Carolla and Prager are two men that make their living by challenging ideas through humor, debate, social commentary, and if warranted, ridicule. Adam did *Dancing with the Stars*, so he knows a little something about ridicule; that Bruno can be merciless. Dennis has been doing talk radio for more than three decades while Adam hosts the most-downloaded podcast in existence. They constantly have guests on who disagree with them on many subjects. Challenging ideas and points of views— while having your own challenged— is an important part of the public discourse. When we enter into robust debate the best ideas will most often rise. It's when ideas and points of view are censored that our country loses, because we may miss new ideas or other ones may not have been properly examined.

Second, many of us are parents who have or will be sending our kids to college in the not so distant future. We want them to be shaped, challenged, and matured in their experience. We know this is a lot to ask from an institution receiving government funds, but we're optimists. If our kids choose a career that requires college, we truly want them to be trained to be the best in their fields. If it doesn't, then they will have been failed by the very institution whose job is to educate and prepare them. Most students agree, as a recent poll reveals 69% of respondents believe college should prepare you for a specific

job or career.¹ What kind of preparation is being provided if we are avoiding discussions on tough subjects? Are true facts and best research being sidelined because it's taboo to someone's feelings? We can understand how the bar in something like gender studies is so low as there really isn't a big consequence. But do you really want an engineer who designed the plane you're flying in to feel that the reality of gravity is a Caucasian micro-aggression because it was discovered by Newton?

Third, as concerned citizens we know that what happens at college does not stay at college. There seems to be a growing movement to shut down differing points of view that are not politically correct or fit neatly into today's "speech codes", which are nothing short of thought-regulation. And the centrifuge of this movement is ironically the college campus, the place that has traditionally been the center of the free exchange of ideas. Instead, colleges now have places known as "safe spaces" where students who feel threatened by concepts, ideas, or differing views may retreat. Instead of fostering the development of young adults, colleges are providing coloring books, play-doh, puppies, and stuffed animals.² It's basically your four-year-old daughter's bedroom where one can shut out the challenges and facts of the outside world. Providing this bubble wrapped type of education does not prepare the next generation for the challenges of life. It prepares them for failure. Can you imagine a student like this getting a job in customer service for an IT company where millions of dollars are on the line, and rather than being able to address or fix a problem, they will need play-doh and puppies to get through the day? We would argue that the only thing worse than being uneducated is being mis-educated.

We've also seen how speakers have faced being shut down, intimidated from speaking, and even physically assaulted on campus. Carolla and Prager recently faced being shut down when we planned to hold an event at Cal State Northridge for our film. We had confirmed the rental of the facilities and then two weeks prior to the event were told the school did not want to have controversial speakers such as Carolla and Prager on campus. We can understand that some radical feminists wouldn't want the former star of the *Man Show* on their campus, but why not Dennis? He's really just tall and smart. This was later deemed a "scheduling conflict" not a "content conflict". Eventually, after lawyers jumped in, the scheduling conflict was resolved and the event was held. It went on to produce a #1 iTunes comedy album. But it showed us up close what is happening on campus. And it shocked us because our colleges should be an important place that embraces free speech, intellectual diversity, and challenging ideas.

¹Today's Student survey project by Cengage Learning
http://assets.cengage.com/pdf/wp_todays-student-work-ready.pdf

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/22/opinion/sunday/judith-shulevitz-hiding-from-scary-ideas.html>

The cry for diversity on college campuses is loud and unrelenting, and it's also total boloney. College campuses are one of the most diverse places in our nation in terms of race, gender, class, and ethnicity. But true diversity includes intellectual diversity, where differing points of view and ideas can be discussed, even the ones we vehemently disagree with. True diversity requires points of view we disagree with. Otherwise it isn't diverse, only self re-affirming. The diversity being pushed on campus is not one of true diversity, but reaffirming already approved thoughts. This point couldn't be made any clearer than by Sol Stern, one of the co-founders of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement in the 1960's. Stern— looking back 50 years later— on what he saw as the failure of the original Free Speech Movement. He observed, “the claim that the FSM was fighting for free speech for all (i.e., the First Amendment) was always a charade. Within weeks of FSM's founding, it became clear to the leadership that the struggle was really about clearing barriers to using the campus as a base for radical political activity. Our movement ignored Orwell's warning that ‘political language is designed to make lies sound truthful.’”³

Orwell was right. And 50 years later the climate on college campuses is growing worse. The stated goal of diversity has been one of inclusion, but the recent growth of “identity politics” has reversed this to ultimately promote exclusion. While our national motto is “E Pluribus Unum,” or “out of many, one,” identity politics creates a divisive power play on the pattern of basing one's identity on characterizations like race, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, and on down the line in as many divided categories of oppression as one can imagine.

If there was a game of “identity poker,” as white males, Carolla and Prager would be holding low cards while a female playing at the same table would be holding a low pair. An African-American lesbian would be holding a nice straight, but she would be trumped by a one legged, trans-gendered Muslim who would be holding a straight flush. Ultimately, identity politics in our society does not bring us together, but eventually divides us until we are ruled by the tyranny of one. Someone somewhere is always offended. The Constitution does not protect against hurt feelings, yet this is ultimately what is being promoted.

Ignoring issues, facts, and viewpoints we do not like does not make them go away. This approach compounds the issue, as students no longer learn how to engage ideas, thoughts, and even people. They are encouraged not to try and solve problems but to run away. Ideas that can't stand up to debate should not be coddled and protected, they should be exposed. Free debate elevates the best ideas. This is how we moved forward throughout history. This is what drove our founding.

³ <https://www.city-journal.org/html/free-speech-movement-50-11433.html>

College campuses were once a fantastic place for comedians like Adam Carolla to perform. But today the negatively charged environment where everyone is offended has made it toxic. It's so bad that some of the top comedians, including Jerry Seinfeld, Bill Maher and Chris Rock—not exactly a right-wing cabal— have noted that performing on a college campus is no longer a real option due to the labyrinth of speech codes and hurt feelings. Comedians explore many subjects, many of which include stereotypes. They then they make social commentary or a joke about it. String enough of those together and there's a routine. Offending people is the foundation of what comedians do. Finding a moment, person, group, or idea and holding it up for ridicule has been a part of comedy since the very first joke ever told. Someone will almost always be offended, but if you're a good comedian the joke will reveal a truth we can all recognize. Without this we're all just sitting in a dark theater buying two overpriced drinks. Comedians are the modern-day court jesters holding the mirror of truth back up to society.

One of the other most concerning actions on campus, are the reactions by students to what they deem micro-aggressions by using macro-aggressions (or what us working people would call rioting). In the last several years we have seen an alarming amount of hostility on campuses, which can only be equated to temper tantrums set on fire. No one would ever agree with every single speaker brought to campus, but those speakers have a first amendment right to speak, not to be intimidated, shut down, or violently attacked. We've all heard about the incidents at Yale, Berkeley, Middlebury, Brandeis, Claremont McKenna and recently Evergreen College. These are places where ideas should be interchanged, rebutted, peacefully challenged, and maybe laughed at, but not shut down. Hating the hater is still hate, but the irony of this statement does not seem to break through the eggshell of thinking so pervasive amongst these college students. And Berkeley's Hate Free Zone seems to be one of the greatest examples of irony, lost on a bunch of kids who are paying a lot of money for an education.

But let's be very clear—it's not just the students who are to blame. Campus administrators and teachers have promoted these ideas and then retreated to the sidelines when it became violent. It's as if the mental patients are now running the asylum. Where is the accountability from the administrations of these colleges and universities? How can there be accountability if there is no adult in the room? Why aren't administrators accountable to us, the taxpayers, as we continue to fund this Social Justice Neverland, completely disconnected from the real world of working and regular people.

Americans, from the beginning, have always like to argue and debate, even amongst friends. And we're damn good at it. The element of debate is a hallmark of our country, from the time of Sam Adams. By the way, he was not named after the beer, the beer was named after him. So, if you learn nothing else from today, hang on to that. We may or may not include that fact in the film.

But seriously, America has always been that “safe space” where truth can be spoken to power. Where “We the People” can challenge a king and a corrupt idea like a monarchy. This right has been re-affirmed through our history. It’s been fought for and people have died for it. We must understand that we have the right to free expression, not the right to not be offended. This fundamental difference is being lost on today’s college campuses.

We should not be teaching students to retreat from debate, but to charge intellectually into it. And we should hold college administrators accountable for stifling debate. This is one of the most valuable and profound gifts given to us in the founding of America.

Thank you for your time.

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